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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 IRAN RPO DUBAI 000060

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TAGS: [IR](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [PTER](#)
SUBJECT: NEW IRGC HEAD JAFARI DESCRIBED AS A BETTER SOLDIER AND
MODERATE THAN SAFAVI

REF: RPO DUBAI 0055

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CLASSIFIED BY: Jillian Burns, Director, Iran Regional Presence
Office, Department of State.
REASON: 1.4 (d)

1.(S//NF) Summary: A contact who claims to have worked for three years as the deputy of new IRGC head Jafari described him as an excellent soldier, a war hero, and more moderate than his predecessor Safavi. The contact did not think the timing of the change was linked to rumors that the US would designate the IRGC as a terrorist group. He claimed that it was a normal rotation, actually overdue, requested by Safavi. He also claimed that two groups had been working for Safavi's ouster: an internal group including Jafari who disagreed with Safavi over administrative matters, and an external group led by Deputy Interior Minister Zolqadr who disagreed with Safavi over political issues. The contact clearly thought Jafari was better qualified for the job for Safavi, but at the same time noted that he thought the appointment signified that Iran was seriously preparing itself in case of military attack. End Summary

2.(U) Supreme Leader Khamenei named Brigadier General Mohammad Ali Jafari to replace Major General Yahya Rahim Safavi as head of the IRGC September 1 and promoted him to major general. Khamenei appointed Safavi as his advisor for military affairs. (Note: In a subsequent press interview, Safavi noted it was the first time the Supreme Leader has appointed a military commander as an advisor. Endnote)

3.(S//NF) An ongoing contact, purported a former IRGC general, said he served as Mohammad Ali Jafari's deputy for three years while Jafari headed the IRGC infantry. The contact said he worked in the budget and planning office. The former general clearly has a positive opinion of Jafari, describing him as a good soldier and a good man. He said Jafari is tough, a professional soldier, a war hero, a better organizer and fighter than Safavi. He also believed that Jafari is more moderate than Safavi and not political. He claimed that Jafari is not in the group close to Ahmadinejad. In his judgment, Jafari does not lie, and he thought Jafari would give the Supreme Leader realistic assessments of Iran's military capabilities. The contact said that Jafari, an architectural engineer by training, has long been involved in the IRGC's traditional construction

projects, but claimed that Jafari is opposed to IRGC's involvement in business, licit or otherwise.

Reasons for change

4.(S//NF) The contact said that Jafari would not seek conflict but if ordered to fight, would do a better job than Safavi. He believed the significance of the selection of Jafari to be that Iran was seriously preparing itself for the threat of war. (Note: When asked how he thought Iran would respond in case of a military attack, the former IRGC general indicated he thought Iran would respond using both conventional and asymmetrical means. Endnote) The contact, similar to analysts quoted in various press reports, did not think the timing of the announcement had anything to do with press reports that the US was considering designating the IRGC a terrorist entity. He said the replacement of Safavi was a normal rotation, that in fact Safavi had been in his position for longer than normal. He claimed that Safavi was "tired" and had been requesting to step down for a year.

5.(S//NF) The ex-general also claimed that two separate groups had been working for Safavi's ouster. One was a group internal to the IRGC which reportedly differed with Safavi over how the IRGC was being administered (NFI). This group included 11 commanders, of which Jafari was the most significant one, and was supported by former IRGC head Mohsen Rezaie, now secretary of the Expediency Council. The second, external group was reportedly led by Deputy Interior Minister for security affairs Mohammad Baqer Zolqadr, formerly deputy IRGC commander, considered ultra-right wing. This group reportedly had political differences with Safavi and thought he was too moderate.

6.(S//NF) One apparent cause of friction between Safavi and Zolqadr was Zolqadr's alleged continued dominance over the Qods Force, as well as the IRGC counter-intelligence unit. Zolqadr, before moving to the Interior Ministry, reportedly put his own

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people in both organizations and retains significant influence over both organizations. The ex-general claimed Zolqadr tried to recruit him when he was in the IRGC, promising him promotions, but Safavi warned him not to join with Zolqadr. The contact, when asked about the Ramazan force, claimed that the Ramazan Force, led by Zolqadr, operated inside Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war but indicated that this group was no longer in existence. He also claimed that Zolqadr and his group are backing hardline cleric Grand Ayatollah Naser Makarem Shirazi to be the next Supreme Leader but for now do not have sufficient power to try to effect a change.

7.(S//NF) According to the contact, Jafari and Zolqadr are not close and belong to different groups, but they are not enemies, like Safavi and Zolqadr. One area in which Jafari and Zolqadr do not agree is reportedly Zolqadr's support for IRGC business activities.

Jafari Biographic data

8.(S//NF) According to the contact, Jafari began university a year before the revolution. After the revolution he volunteered to fight against the Iraqis and later joined the IRGC. While still in his 20s, he headed the Western unit at one point during the war (reportedly there were three units - Northwestern, Western, and Southern). The contact did not think Jafari had traveled outside of Iran. According to press reports, Jafari was one of the 24 IRGC commanders who sent a letter to then President Khatami in 1999, threatening action if Khatami did not control the student demonstrations. According to a September 3, 2007 article in conservative Keyhan newspaper, Jafari was "active" in the US Embassy hostage-taking.

Other comments

9.(S//NF) The former general said he supports talks between the US and Iran, saying he believed Iran would take positive steps if it got a security guarantee from the US. He made clear he had no information to confirm this but thought that the recent six month ceasefire announced by Moqtada al-Sadr in Iraq was likely the result of Iranian pressure and could be viewed as a positive outcome from the US-Iran Baghdad talks.

10.(S//NF) The ex-general said the IRGC and the regular army were set up to be complementary, with different taskings, to avoid competition. He said they copied the US system, modeling the IRGC on the US Marine Corp. He claimed that years ago in a private meeting, Khomeini had told them to copy the US military and focus on long-term planning "like the Americans."

11.(S//NF) Comment: While we have no way of confirming the contact's claim to have been an IRGC general and to have worked under Jafari, he was introduced by a long-time contact and appears from his comments to have a deep knowledge of the IRGC. He appeared uncomfortable only once, when IRPO Director asked about the Ramazan Force, as if he had not been prepared to talk about it. He reportedly left the IRGC over eight years ago but claims continued contact with regime insiders. He exhibits a clear dislike of the extreme right in Iran, calling President Ahmadinejad "crazy." End comment
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